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Allen-Scott Report

Invasion Of Cuba?

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WASHINGTON — President Johnson faces a new thorny decision on Communist-ruled Cuba—that may be a lot tougher than countering Castro's cut-off of Guantanamo's water supply.

Manuel Ray, one-time Minister of Public Works in the Castro regime and among the most controversial leaders of the Cuban exiles, proposes to launch a new guerrilla underground on the island and wants U.S. assistance. Specifically, Ray is seeking two things:

Assurance that the U.S. will not interfere with his infiltration of fighting men and arms into Cuba.

A steady flow of funds and weapons to support his combat operations when they get underway.

An avowed Socialist, Ray announced last May he was organizing a new force that would "invade" Cuba within a year. Through emissaries, he has notified authorities in the State and Justice Departments and Central Intelligence Agency he is now ready to start infiltrating his troops.

Their number is placed at between 700 and 900.

They have been undergoing rigorous training in Puerto Rico and Venezuela, where they have had the support of former President Betancourt. His recently inaugurated successor is reputedly also behind them.

Trained to operate in small guerrilla units, they will embark for Cuba from Venezuela and one other Central American country. Ray's plan is to follow Castro's successful tactics of infiltrating into the mountains of Oriente Province and striking from there.

Ray and most of his officers are thoroughly acquainted with this region.

Backstage Split

In weighing Ray's potentially highly explosive proposals, President Johnson is confronted with sharply clashing views among his top advisers.

Foremost among the left-leaning Cuban exile leader's supporters are Attorney General Robert Kennedy, Defense Secretary McNamara, and important officials of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Secretary Rusk is strongly against Ray's venture. The State Department head argues it might escalate into a new dangerous confrontation between the U.S. and Russia. It is Rusk's contention the U. S. should limit its efforts to topple the Communist Castro regime by economic and diplomatic measures—despite their patent ineffectualness.

Still on the fence are two other key officials—CIA Director John McCone and Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Mann, in charge of Latin American affairs.

McCone is much concerned about the wide variance in CIA over Ray; with some officials vigorously favoring him and others equally against him. Also, McCone is wary of Ray's past close association with Castro and his known radical economic views.

The fact that the Joint Chiefs of Staff also are chary of Ray is influencing McCone in withholding a decision regarding him.

Assistant Secretary Mann is keeping an open mind pending a thorough study of Ray's plans and background. Because of the President's confidence in Mann, his counsel is certain to be influential.

Under the late President Kennedy, Ray visited Attorney General Kennedy in his Washington home. At one time, he was widely credited among Cuban exiles as the Kennedy administration's favored anti-Castro leader. He still appears to have the confidence of the attorney general and important elements in the Defense Department and CIA.

Whether they are enough to overcome the skepticism of Secretary Rusk and other high-placed authorities remains to be seen.

Siding with them in this wariness are rival refugee leaders who are critical of Ray on the ground he is a "dedicated leftist." Some who were on close terms with him are now actively against him. They charge Ray's basic policy is "Castroism without Castro."

Seething Cauldron

Senator George Aiken, Vt., a veteran member of the Foreign Relations Committee, is privately warning that a revolution is "highly likely" in strife-and inflation-racked Brazil by Easter. Aiken has authoritative information that extreme leftist and rightists are busily arming in preparation for attempts to seize power. . . . President Gamal Nasser, who is continuing to publicly threaten war in the Middle East, has secretly signed a so-called "technical assistance" agreement with Russia to provide equipment and scientists for an atomic center. This Inshas Center is to be built by the Soviet ostensibly for "peaceful purposes", but with no outside check to determine its true nature.